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ABSTRACT

This report was written with the public, not professional educators in mind, and sought to tell a story without jargon. It discusses the challenges of changing public schools and the setbacks that must be faced. (Author)

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THE ANNENBERG CHALLENGE

LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC SCHOOL REFORM

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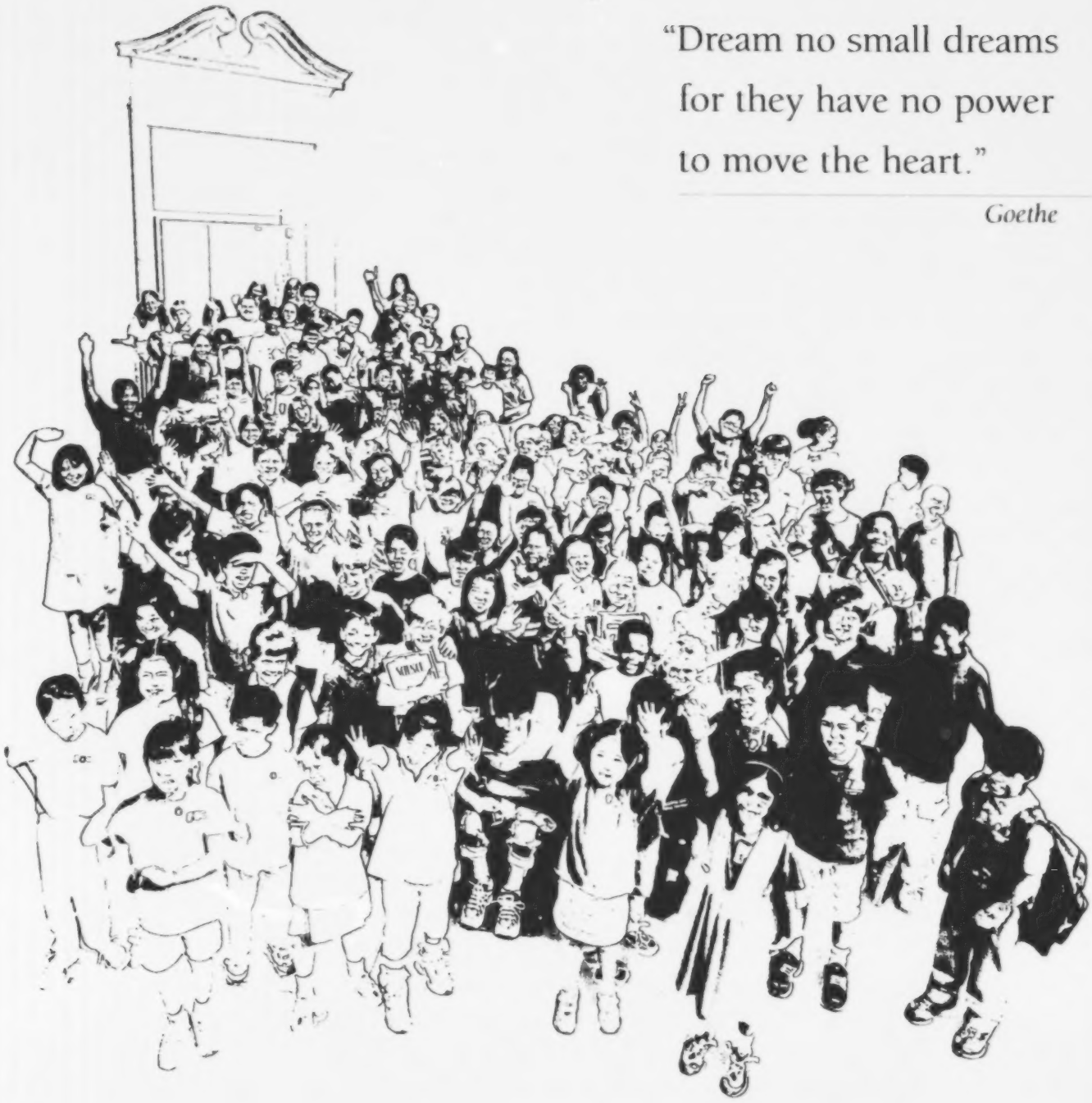

"Dream no small dreams
for they have no power
to move the heart."

Goethe

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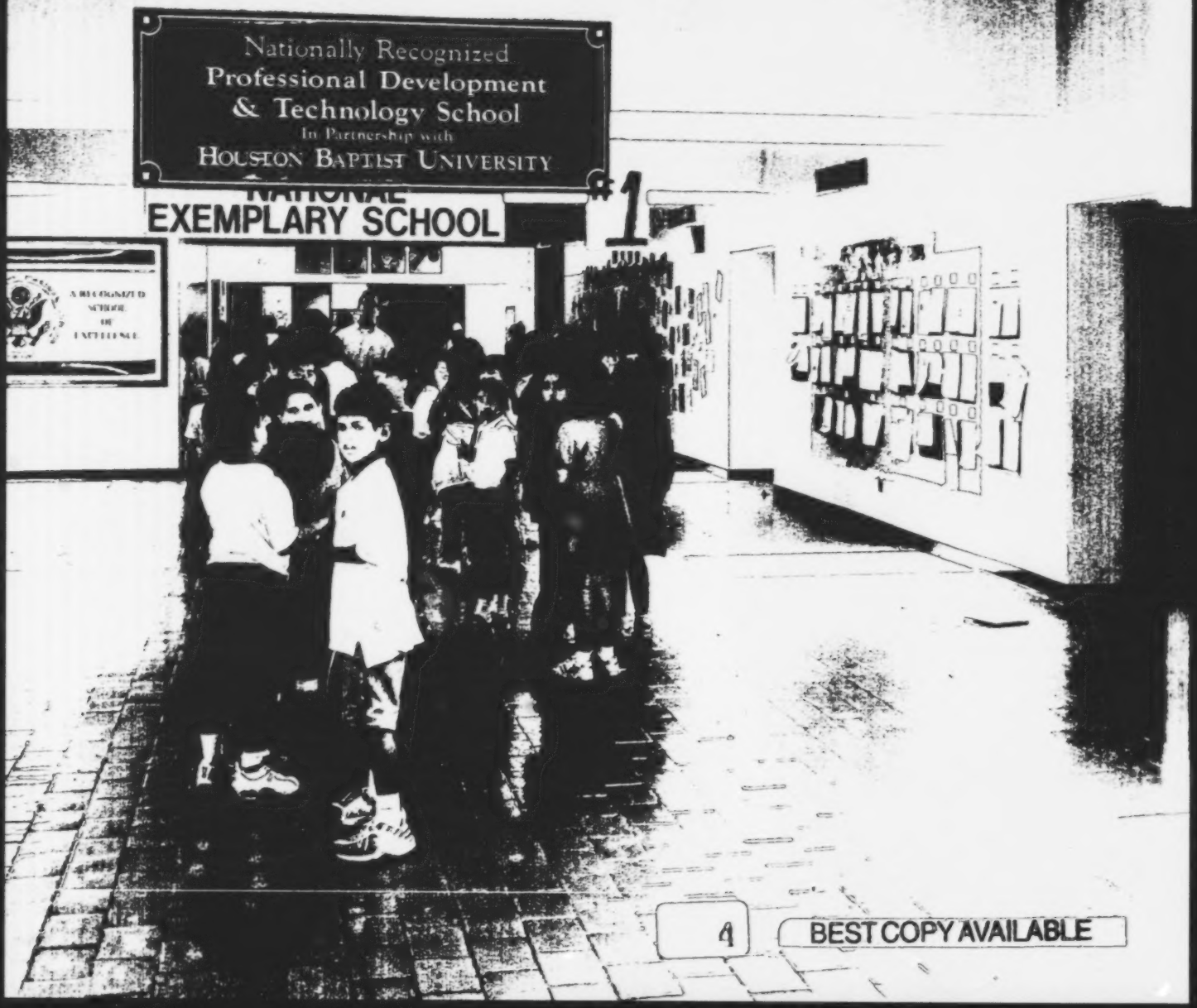

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Carnegie Corporation of New York

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March 13, 2002

Vartan Gregorian
President

Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg
Chairman of the Board
The Annenberg Foundation

My dear Ambassador Annenberg:

In December 1993, you issued an unprecedented challenge on behalf of the nation's public schools. You implored individuals as well as foundations and corporations not to walk away from public education, especially in our largest cities. The $500 million Annenberg Challenge was a metaphor for change as well as hope.

Much has been accomplished since then. The Challenge generated more than $600 million in matching grants from private and public sources and spent $1.1 billion on initiatives at 18 sites. It worked inside schools in America's biggest cities as well as hundreds of rural communities from Maine to Alaska.

In a country as diverse as ours, it was fitting that the Challenge embraced not one but many different approaches to creating good schools. It had no dogma, just a conviction that all children can learn and that all benefit from high standards.

The Challenge did not reinvent education reform, of course, but it sought to recognize, reenergize and reward those reformers already active in urban centers. Along the way, it strengthened and brought cohesion to disparate reform programs and efforts.

The Challenge was scrupulously nonpartisan. It brought new blood from civic, business and university leaders, as well as from foundations and other groups, to the work of improving schools. It built broad, public-private coalitions that harnessed the energy, talent and tools of mayors, superintendents, principals, union leaders, civic leaders and community groups. It welcomed donors big and small. Most important, the Challenge helped make improving public schools an abiding national priority.

This Challenge was not just financial but moral and political. You recognized that after decades of neglect and decline, schools could not be rebuilt overnight. No single gift, however large, was great enough to transform our schools completely. But you also knew school reform takes a long, sustained effort, and the Challenge could serve as a major catalyst to move schools forward.

The Challenge has registered many significant accomplishments, from engaging thousands of teachers in improving their classroom skills to helping small schools flourish in New York City to pushing whole schools in Boston and the San Francisco Bay area toward higher standards to creating a new sense of purpose for schools across rural America.

It has been a privilege to work with you on this noble endeavor. The task is far from finished. But "Lessons and Reflections" shows how much we have accomplished and points ways for us all to build on this progress in the future.

With best wishes,

Vartan Gregorian

Vartan Gregorian
President, Carnegie Corporation
New York, New York

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Summary

The faces of the children peering through the classroom windows on the cover of this report are just some of the 1.5 million children whose lives were touched by the Annenberg Challenge.

The Challenge revived and inspired school reform efforts throughout the nation. It set three goals: To improve education in troubled inner-city

Learning about the ocean at Wilson Elementary School in San Leandro, California, a part of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative.

schools, to bring long overdue assistance to isolated rural schools, and to demonstrate that the arts should be a basic part of every child's education.

But the Challenge was about more than education. It recognized that strengthening public education was vital to preserving the nation's democratic values. Unless every child had an equal opportunity to get a quality education, the promise of America would be broken.

In all, 18 school improvement projects were launched, supported by new partnerships of Americans who had been stirred to action.

The Challenge did not work miracles, but it breathed new life into American education. It brought hope to schools that had been all but abandoned. It helped educators who had accepted mediocrity and failure to make a new commitment to excellence. It helped teachers to change their minds about students they thought were doomed to failure. It changed the public's beliefs about what is possible in public education.

Though there is still much more to be done, public schools are better today, and teachers are more prepared to help children meet high standards of learning.

The Annenberg Challenge:

Demonstrated that all children can benefit from high expectations and standards if they have programs that meet their needs and qualified teachers to instruct them.

Expanded professional development opportunities for tens of thousands of educators. Improving teaching was the largest and most productive Challenge activity.

Revitalized arts education and led to the hiring of more than 1,000 teachers of music, art, and dance in New York City.

Found ways to make big schools small to strengthen the all-important connection between students and teachers.

Enhanced parental involvement by breaking down the barriers between the school and the home.

Helped schools to form support networks in some of the largest cities in America.

Created intermediary organizations outside of regular school channels. These organizations provided a place where many citizens who had been reluctant to participate in school reform could go to get involved.

Launched important new community partnerships that will carry on the work of the Challenge.

Strengthened the visibility, credibility, and confidence of rural schools.

Bolstered the public's capacity and will to support public education.

The Annenberg Challenge: Lessons and Reflections on Public School Reform is a report on the findings and recommendations drawn from the broad experience of project activities. The lessons summarized here can provide a springboard for continued aggressive and comprehensive school reform throughout the nation.

We invite all Americans to read this report and share it with others in their communities. We believe that putting the public back into public education is the best way to ensure the future of every child and the future of America.

LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS
ON PUBLIC SCHOOL REFORM

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Foreword

The Annenberg Foundation and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform commissioned "Lessons and Reflections" not to memorialize further a landmark philanthropic gesture but to impart what we learned from successes and failures. We wrote this report with the public, not professional educators, in mind and sought to tell our story without the jargon that makes so many education reports (and conversations) impenetrable. For those seeking an academic review of the Annenberg Challenge work, the individual sites have started releasing their independent evaluations. The Institute also plans to release a cross-site report on the Challenge research effort in the fall of 2002.

We learned the hard way that if you seek to change the public schools, you must be prepared to deal with repeated setbacks, rapid turnover in leadership and sudden changes in direction. We encountered problems and policy reversals in some places that took everyone by surprise. Many Challenge projects made midcourse corrections. We learned to adapt.

We believe our experiences will ring true to those fighting on the front lines for better schools. These lessons may be especially helpful for those in the wider community who wonder: Where do we go from here? What holds the most promise for helping all children learn? How do we give teachers and principals the tools to help every child reach their full potential?

"Lessons and Reflections" focuses on these issues.

The Challenge An Investment in the "Future of America's Children"

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On a blustery December morning in 1993, President Bill Clinton summoned governors, leading educators and business executives to the Roosevelt Room of the White House to herald the Annenberg Foundation's donation of $500 million to public education. He paid tribute to retired publisher Walter Annenberg and his wife, Leonore, for making the largest gift in history to the "future of America's children." The 85-year-old former ambassador to Great Britain spoke of his conviction that allowing public education to fail would "destroy our way of life in the United States." Annenberg framed the gift as "a challenge to the nation" and invited fellow citizens, foundations and corporations to "join this crusade for the betterment of our country."

The gift could not have come at a better time. Many school districts could boast of pockets of success, where children made impressive gains despite the handicaps of poverty. But those were the exceptions. Too many children were not even acquiring basic skills in school – let alone the education they needed to lead rewarding, productive lives.

Working with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, the Annenberg Foundation sought to revive lagging reform efforts and inspire new ones. Rather than ignoring work under way, it built on existing reforms and sought to lend coherence to innumerable overlapping and uncoordinated projects – "projectitis," as one big city superintendent called it. In each place where it worked, the Annenberg Challenge enlisted local leaders to develop a strategy for their Challenge project and required them to match the Foundation grants dollar for dollar or two for one.

The Challenge concentrated its passion and resources on touching the lives of children in America's cities. One-third of the 47 million public school students attend urban schools. The troubles of inner-city schools – from shaky finances to dilapidated facilities to dismal test scores to staggering dropout rates – were legion. Many students are poor, most are minorities, and a growing number come from homes where English is not spoken or spoken infrequently.

Less well known were the challenges that children in rural America faced. Almost a quarter of the population lives in places with 2,500 or fewer residents, and one-quarter of public schools are rural. They enroll 1 in 8 students, and many are no stranger to the problems of poverty and scarce resources. Most national conversations about school reform ignored the needs of these schools. The Challenge extended a hand to them as well.

The Challenge took on a third thrust that came as no surprise to anyone familiar with the passion of the Annenbergs for the arts. It became a major benefactor of arts education projects in New York City and Minneapolis as well as a national arts education program.

The story of the national Challenge and the 18 individual project sites is complex. We did not work miracles. The public schools in most major cities still are not doing the job they must.

We have worked inside the schools of our largest urban systems. We saw progress first-hand. Public schools are better today than they were a decade ago, and teachers are better equipped to help children overcome obstacles and achieve higher standards.

Some of the most important, successful and lasting efforts of the Challenge involved the adults who have the responsibility for educating children – especially teachers. This leads us to believe that one of the surest ways to improve student achievement is to enhance the skills of teachers.

That's why the Challenge projects devoted most of their energy and funds toward improving the professional development of educators. More than anything else that we did, this paid dividends across the country. Our grants gave teachers rich opportunities to become better and that will give children better opportunities to learn in the years ahead.

The Challenge also raised the profile of rural schools and created networks that give rural educators and rural communities confidence and a more powerful voice in their future.

Diversity at Wilson Elementary School, where English is the second language for many students.

The Challenge did not prescribe one strategy to remedy schools' shortcomings. It encouraged districts and those working with them to try different approaches in hopes of discovering different pathways to success. The Challenge came with no ideology other than nonpartisanship, but it embraced the unshakable premise that all children can learn and that good teaching was vital to their success. We sought to build and strengthen parent involvement in their children's classrooms, and we looked for allies in the wider community, for we knew that you cannot turn failing schools around without strong community support.

We did not invent the idea of creating intermediary organizations to work on improving the schools, but the Challenge demonstrated their usefulness and resiliency.

We brought new partners to this work – university presidents, newspaper publishers, foundation executives and others who had sat on the sidelines. We convinced many that school reform is too difficult for overburdened schools to do alone. We created a vehicle where successful, committed people from other walks of life could become deeply involved without becoming mired in school politics and bureaucracy.

Each Challenge project worked closely with the local districts but usually at arm's length from the superintendents, school boards and teacher unions. They did this both to avoid entanglement in local politics and to ensure that the Challenge grants did not simply disappear inside the larger school budgets. At times, Challenge projects found themselves at odds with one or more of their partners. Sometimes the tension was healthy. Sometimes it slowed the work.

Initially, there was great excitement about Ambassador Annenberg's outsized gift and his dream of renewing the national commitment to public education. The press wrote flattering accounts. However, some of the media's coverage turned critical. Several years into the Challenge, a volley of newspaper articles suggested it had fallen far short of its lofty goals. Advocates of vouchers were prominent among the nay sayers, they

Hands on instruction at a computer lab at Wilson Elementary School.

Learning to fish farm at the Consolidated School in Lubec, Maine, a part of the Rural Challenge.

argued that Annenberg money would have been better spent on creating alternatives to public schools, not – as they saw it – just propping them up.

The Challenge was not the only target of such criticism. School reformers at this struggle for a decade or longer fought fatigue in their ranks and, in some quarters, self-doubt. Many states, impatient with the uneven progress of local reforms, imposed high stakes tests and other top-down changes on the schools.

The Challenge has been honored to work side by side with many of the talented, dedicated Americans who strive every day to give children the best possible education. We say to all of these citizens: keep it up. Your work is paying off, and you're making real progress. We will continue to support your efforts.

Although the Challenge grants largely have ended, the challenge has not. Several major projects are moving forward with new funding from Annenberg and other foundations. In most sites, successor organizations already have taken up this work. These groups, old and new, will use our "big tent" approach and look to involve more foundations, businesses and other community forces in partnerships with public schools. The work is well under way, but the job is far from done. Working together, we can and will continue to make public schools better.

II. How It Started

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Before examining what the Annenberg Challenge did, let us explain how it started. Ambassador Annenberg turned for advice to his *pro bono* education adviser, Vartan Gregorian, then the president of Brown University and currently president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York; Ted Sizer, who led the Coalition of Essential Schools based at Brown; and David Kearns, a former Xerox Corp. chairman turned proponent for education reform.

The Foundation awarded $57 million to support New American Schools (NAS) and gave $6 million to the Education Commission of the States to disseminate NAS models for restructuring schools. $50 million went to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to make it a greenhouse of ideas and school improvement strategies. That left $387 million to be distributed to public school projects across the country.

Dr. Gregorian recruited university presidents and business leaders to assemble civic teams in various cities to pursue Challenge grants. These local leaders were given wide latitude, but they were expected to embrace the Challenge's fundamental beliefs about good schools. That credo was the following:

- All children can learn.
- All children benefit from rigorous, uncompromising academic standards – especially children from impoverished homes and families.
- Children learn more in small schools and settings where teachers know them well.
- Teachers need to measure students' strengths and weaknesses regularly and use the results to tailor instruction to the child.
- Schools must engage parents as active partners in their learning communities.
- Schools cannot succeed without political, financial and moral support from their communities.
- Schools work better in networks than in isolation.
- To change entire systems, policies that perpetuate inequities and hold schools back must be changed.

The schools in the national Coalition of Essential Schools shared many of these tenets, and they became the hallmark of many of the 2,400 schools in 300 districts in 35 states with which the Challenge wound up working.

A small staff in the national Challenge office based at the Institute initially provided limited technical support. In later years, the Institute staff became more deeply involved.

The largest grants to Challenge sites were for $50 million or more over five years. Each site faced the daunting task of figuring out how to spread the money widely enough to have an impact on a district or region but not so widely that it simply disappeared. Inevitably, they struggled with this question of how far to cast their nets. Most Challenge sites chose to go wider rather than deeper. Those in the San Francisco Bay area, Los Angeles, Houston, South Florida and elsewhere tackled multiple districts instead of confining themselves to a single large urban system. Others in Chicago and Boston worked with half their cities' schools, and the project in Philadelphia sought to make a difference in every school at once.

For grants awarded to Challenge sites, the Foundation sought to maximize the amount spent at the school level and minimize expenditures on administration and overhead. The Foundation directed that 90 percent of each grant be spent in ways that reached inside schools and classrooms and touched the lives of teachers and students. The Challenge sites lived with the worry that the schools they chose to work with would not be the ones that most needed help – those that were

Painting mural tiles at Wilson Elementary School.

too disorganized or dispirited to know how to secure help or what to request. The Challenge sites attempted large deeds while operating on tight budgets with limited staffs.

Most Challenge sites discovered that their work was just starting once they chose the schools. The teachers and staffs inside these schools needed help, advice and direction, and they looked to the Challenge site staff to provide it. Who else had the time? Teachers were swamped with work – analyzing data, working on coaching and mentoring, working with universities on training new teachers, writing reports and proposals – on top of their regular classroom jobs.

The New York Networks for School Renewal, a coalition of four diverse community and school reform groups, received a $25 million Challenge grant in November 1994. New Visions for Public Schools, the Center for Collaborative Education, the Manhattan Institute's Center for Educational Innovation, and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now had already embraced the idea of carving out smaller, friendlier schools in New York City's one million-plus student system. If small schools could prosper in New York's legendary bureaucracy, they could make it anywhere.

By June 1995, the Foundation had awarded five additional grants that brought the total allocated to Challenge sites to $252 million.

- The Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP) received $53 million to work with the 700,000-student Los Angeles Unified School District and 13 other districts in the greater Los Angeles area.
- The Chicago Annenberg Challenge received $49 million to work with a system serving 435,000 students.
- The Children Achieving Challenge in Philadelphia received $50 million to implement a 10-point package of reforms, including tougher standards, extra resources, school clusters and schools within schools, and more professional development.
- Intrigued by what it had learned about the struggles of schools in rural America, the Foundation invested $50 million in the Rural Challenge, which included $3.25 million to the Blandin Foundation to focus on the reduction

of rural violence and school reform.

- A grant of $25 million went to the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), an ambitious effort to get hundreds of schools and thousands of teachers in the San Francisco Bay area to work together to meet exacting standards.

Originally, the San Francisco Bay area was not invited to apply for a Challenge grant. Its public school districts did not rank among the nation's largest. However, it shared their problems, and local educators determined to address the gap between the region's rich and poor did not wait to be asked. They lined up $25 million from William R. Hewlett ($15 million) and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation ($10 million) and proposed to raise another $50 million to work across six counties with more than 740,000 students. The Annenberg Foundation signed on as cosponsor.

The Foundation gave $83 million in grants to four additional sites over the next year and a half:

- $10 million for Boston's schools
- $20 million for Detroit
- $20 million for Houston
- $33 million for South Florida, which included Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties

It also gave $12 million to the Center for Arts Education in New York City and divided $8 million between the national Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC) and Arts for Academic Achievement in Minneapolis. The Center for Arts Education helped convince New York to hire more than a thousand teachers of music, art and dance and restore arts to the curriculum in every New York City school. TETAC teamed with the Getty Education Institute for the Arts to sponsor a national push for arts education, and Arts for Academic Achievement helped elevate the place of the arts in Minneapolis schools.

The Foundation made five "special opportunity" grants of $1 million to $4 million to:

- Atlanta, where the Urban Atlanta Coalition Compact forged a partnership with local colleges and universities to tutor disadvantaged children and improve teacher training.
- Salt Lake City and its surprisingly diverse school system, where almost half the children are minorities and one in four speak limited English.
- Chelsea, Massachusetts, where Boston University was in the middle of a decade-long effort to turn around a school system in a blue-collar, immigrant Boston bedroom community.
- Schools in one of Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods, Sandtown-Winchester, to connect community development with school reform.
- Chattanooga, Tennessee, where citizens had embarked on an unusual, voluntary merger of city schools with the surrounding Hamilton County system.

Most of these projects now have ended, after spending their Challenge grants and even greater amounts raised in private and public matching funds. Nearly all the Challenge sites met or topped their fund-raising goals, meaning that the $500 million allocation of the Foundation raised

an additional $600 million for public education. These projects directly touched the lives of almost 1.5 million students and 80,000 teachers.

Several Challenge sites have transformed into new organizations that will remain a resource and advocate for public school teachers and pupils. The Los Angeles and Rural Challenges passed the baton to groups devoted to shaping public policy. Chicago created that city's first Public Education Fund. The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative,

Focusing on the future at Arminta Elementary School in North Hollywood, California, a part of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project.

which used public accountability and peer review to drive change inside 86 "Leadership Schools," was awarded renewed funding from the Annenberg and Hewlett Foundations to expand its work to 90 more schools. Boston embraced the Boston Plan for Excellence-Annenberg Challenge approach for all of its schools and received additional Annenberg Foundation funding. The Center for Arts Education, which played a pivotal role in convincing New York City to add $75 million a year to its school budget for music, art and dance teachers, and for collaborations with the city's cultural organizations, is pressing ahead with its work with renewed support from Annenberg and other organizations and individuals.

Other projects will continue in a different guise. The New York Networks for School Renewal completed its charge, but its four partner organizations continue their work. Their common cause – making New York's schools smaller and more manageable – is now district policy, and the number of small schools in the city has doubled.

We encountered setbacks and surprises along the way. In Chicago, the Challenge geared up to strengthen parents' involvement in running neighborhood schools, but the Illinois legislature moved in the opposite direction, giving the mayor sweeping authority in 1995 to run the local schools. The mayor installed the city's former budget director as the chief executive officer. The new chief restored the schools' financial health, built dozens of new schools and repaired hundreds of old ones but departed finding it considerably more difficult to remedy academic failings. In New York, Detroit and Los Angeles, both the schools and the Challenge projects weathered repeated turnover of superintendents. The Challenge sites worked closely with some superintendents and at a distance from others. Only a few of the 18 Challenge sites have the same superintendent now as when its grant was awarded.

This work is tough – even tougher than we realized when the Challenge began.

III. What We Learned

By sharing these lessons now with educators, policy-makers and others concerned about public education, we hope to make the challenging work that lies ahead more manageable.

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Lesson 1: **Every child benefits from high expectations and standards.**

Lesson 2: **Even large gifts like ours are no substitute for adequate, equitable and reliable funding.**

Lesson 3: **Schools are too isolated. Reaching out to other schools — forming networks for mutual support and criticism — can help overcome problems.**

Lesson 4: **Schools need lots of allies to do this work. Parents, businesses and foundations all can play a vital role — but their support must be built.**

Lesson 5: **Professional development holds the key to better schools. We found teachers — new ones and veterans — eager to become better instructors, and we helped them do it.**

Lesson 6: **We helped students and teachers to get to know each other better. We found ways to make big schools small and small schools better.**

Lesson 7: **Schools need strong leadership — not just from principals and superintendents — but also in the classroom, on school boards, in the community and in state capitals.**

Lesson 8: **Schools cannot improve without accountability. However, those who set the policy and allocate resources should also be held accountable.**

Lesson 9: **Public education in America is better than its image. Public schools and those who work with them must do a better job of telling their stories.**

V. The Lessons

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LESSON 1:

Every child benefits from high expectations and standards.

If you do not have high expectations, you do not need to be in this building. If you think these poor, little children cannot learn, if you accept bad behavior and poor quality work, this isn't the place for you.

—Chattanooga principal Rebecca Everett

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The Annenberg Challenge concentrated on America's biggest cities, where many students struggle to master the basics. Most of the children in urban schools are African-American, Hispanic or other minorities. A growing number are immigrants or the children of immigrants who came to the United States to escape a lack of freedom and opportunity or even greater poverty in their homelands. The schools are their biggest hope. If we fail them, it is more than a failure of public education. It is the failure of the basic premise of our democratic society: We offer equal opportunity to all, and education holds the key to that opportunity.

We saw that all children can learn in inner-city schools – if they have well-prepared teachers and sufficient support.

In the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, which worked with schools spread across scores of districts in a half-dozen counties in the San Francisco area, Stanford researchers reported that the 86 Leadership Schools gained more ground than non-Annenberg schools, even where the Annenberg schools enrolled more poor and minority children.

These are large, complicated systems, and we don't pretend that the Challenge work alone was what made the difference in their success. The Challenge commissioned independent evaluations of each site's work, and those reports will attempt to answer in detail what impact the Challenge had on student learning. We can offer this observation: We saw enough evidence of improvement to reaffirm our faith in children's ability to meet higher standards.

Often you need to look below the surface to see the changes.

Philadelphia is a district where the schools remained in both financial and academic jeopardy. In December 2001, the state intervened in the largest school district takeover in U.S. history.

Having fun at Kennedy Elementary School in Houston, Texas, a part of the Houston Annenberg Challenge.

Even with a promise of more help from Harrisburg, the school system, with more than 200,000 students, remains chronically underfunded.

However, that is not the whole story in Philadelphia. Amid this turmoil, its test scores managed to rise, particularly in the lower grades where children now attend full-day kindergarten. The district restored summer school and added 30 extra minutes of instruction to each school day. Philadelphia's teachers, who used to get no time for professional development, now spend four days each year working on their instructional skills. Parents and the public at large get ample information about how children and schools

compare with local, state and national standards.

The Challenge did more than encourage teachers and principals to embrace society's demands for higher standards, it gave them extra resources to get the job done. The Challenge used the carrot more than the stick. However, it stressed accountability and prodded schools to face up to shortcomings.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, most of the children at Normal Park Elementary School are bused from a housing project on the other side of town. For some, learning to read is a struggle. Normal Park immerses its children in language from the day they arrive as 5 or 6 year olds. Finger plays, songs and rhymes are recited, chanted and written down. Last year, after an intensive, six-week literacy block, fourth and fifth graders gained six months to four years in reading. Not only did the children with the lowest scores make progress, so did those at the top of the class. Normal Park's experience suggests to us that children can learn at high levels – if they have a program that meets their needs.

The Challenge's arts projects inspired teachers to take a closer look at youngsters who were not succeeding by traditional academic measures. A student's ability to dance or draw or play an instrument does not automatically solve problems with reading and math, but it may allow teachers to see that child in a new light. The arts projects advocate for the infusion of arts into the curricula, not treating them as a frill or a once-a-week obligation.

The Challenge uncovered a hunger for the arts in school systems that had neglected them. Nowhere was this more evident than in New York City, home to prestigious arts institutions, but where school funding for art, music and drama had been starved since the city's fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. When the Center for Arts Education let it be known that schools could apply for a share of its $12 million Challenge grant, 430 New York schools came forward with proposals. The scale of that response was unprecedented. City officials took note and within two years had added $75 million to the school budget to hire new music, dance and art teachers. Harold O. Levy, the school chancellor, told Laurie Tisch Sussman, the chair of the Center for Arts Education, "If you had not existed, we would have had to invent you." Mayor Rudolph Giuliani also hailed the Annenberg program for serving as "a remarkable catalyst to restore arts education throughout the entire public school system."

The Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge, operating through the National Arts Education Consortium at Ohio State University in partnership with the Getty Education Institute for the Arts, field-tested curriculum guidelines in 35 schools and soon will publish them as part of its legacy.

Support from Annenberg also helped restore music and drama to the classrooms and curriculum in Chelsea, Massachusetts, an impoverished district that the state of Massachusetts took over in 1989 and put in the hands of Boston University. A few years ago, the talent show at Chelsea High

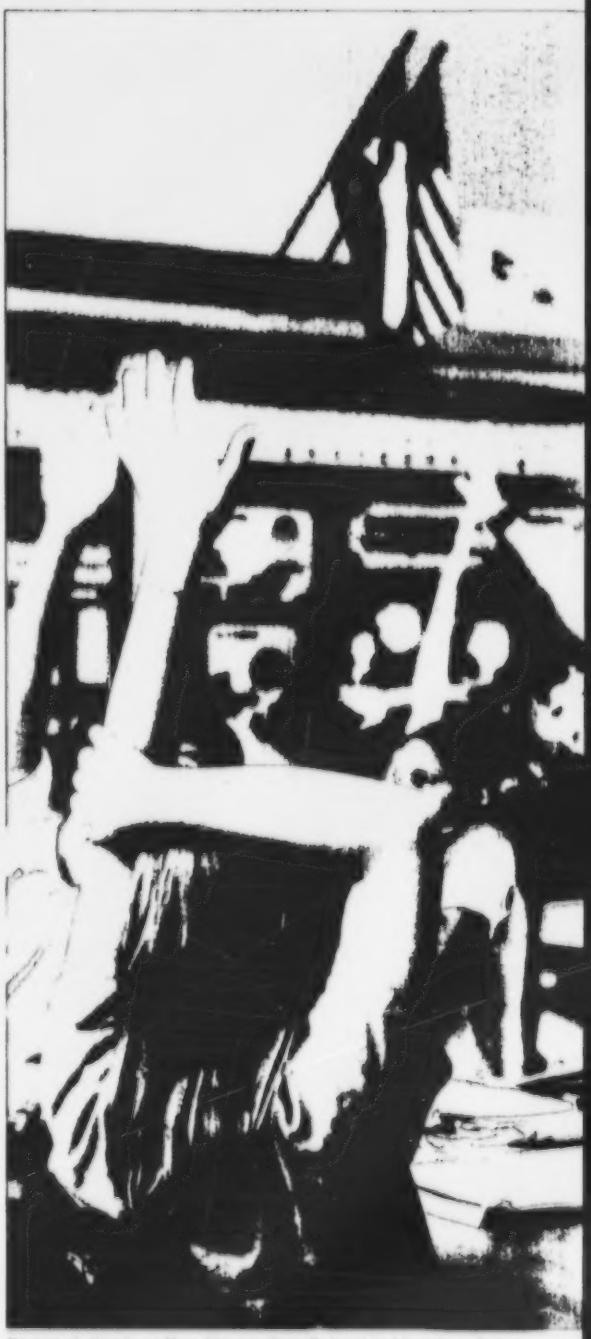
School consisted of a lip-syncing contest. Last year, with the orchestra and choral programs up and running again, students put on a Shakespeare play and the Irving Berlin musical *Anything Goes*.

Chelsea is the place where many poor families who immigrate to the Boston area wind up. Many students come from homes where English is not spoken. Many drop out. The high school has twice as many freshmen as seniors. Neither the intervention of Boston University nor the Challenge has produced a miracle for Chelsea's schools.

However, some things are looking up inside Chelsea's classrooms. Those who stay in school are taking more and tougher college preparation courses. In 1994, Chelsea students took only 13 Advanced Placement tests, and no one passed. In 2000, its students took 115 AP tests, and 51 earned credit from the College Board.

In Chicago, where the Challenge sought out the most racially isolated and impoverished schools, the elementary students the Challenge worked with went from a half-grade behind the city average to a quarter-grade ahead of peers in other schools.

Chicago's schools, like the schools in New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and other large school systems, remain beset with difficulties. But we saw the progress they made by reaching for higher standards, and we are confident that is the direction to maintain for the future.



Eager students at Poe Elementary School in Houston, Texas.

LESSON 2:

Even large gifts like ours are no substitute for adequate, equitable and reliable funding.

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The Annenberg Foundation gift plus matching dollars exceeded $1.1 billion and is an impressive sum. However, it would not cover the costs of a single $25 textbook for each of the 47 million students in public schools.

Although the Challenge made multimillion-dollar grants, nearly every site reached out to hundreds of schools. The money was spread out over five years, and the sums that filtered down to individual schools and classrooms were for modest amounts.

The 86 Leadership Schools in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative got an extra $150 per student per year in discretionary funds. In Chicago, where the Challenge helped more than 300 schools, the typical grant was $39,000 to an elementary school with an annual budget of $3.8 million.

In Los Angeles, the $53 million Challenge grant was stretched to reach 200,000 students in 247 schools across 14 large districts. The Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project worked with 28 "families" of schools, with 8 to 10 schools – typically a high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools – in each family. A school family might share $200,000 a year for activities that included training for teachers, special programs for parents, school-wide reading coaches and computer classes. That boiled down to $20,000 to $30,000 per school.

"We spread ourselves too thin," said Harold Williams, a LAAMP board member and president emeritus of the J. Paul Getty Trust. "If we had taken on fewer school families and focused our dollars and human resources on those, we would have accomplished more."

The Challenge set out to change attitudes inside schools and classrooms. It sought to change the minds of teachers who had come to accept mediocrity and failure, and to change public attitudes about what is possible in public schools.

Although the Challenge itself was never just about money, in several Challenge sites, the schools remain seriously and chronically underfunded.

The Philadelphia schools spend about $7,000 per pupil. They compete for teachers and principals against suburban districts that spend $2,000 to $6,000 more per pupil. The schools in Los Angeles, suffering from two decades of deferred maintenance and neglect, have difficulty educating all 700,000 students at the same time, so a growing number of schools operate on year-round schedules, with a third of the pupils off at any given time.

Monica Lozano, president of *La Opinión* and past president of the California Board of Education, said, "You can work within the school families, you can work at the school site level, but to sustain it, you need a true commitment from those with the budget and resources who make the decisions."

The schools in Detroit and Houston traditionally are hostage to the fortunes of the auto and energy

industries. New York opened this school year with a $150 million shortfall in its $11.5 billion budget. Many cities – including Philadelphia and New York – argue that state funding formulas shortchange urban areas.

Critics often say that public schools already have received enormous spending increases over the past two decades with little to show for it. Some

Seeing the possibilities at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, part of a program funded by the Center for Arts Education.

of that growth has gone to pay for special education, health and other services that schools now provide, either routinely or because the courts require them. The public schools in Chelsea, Massachusetts, for instance, spent $6,104 per pupil in 1999 – but $15,769 for each child in special education.

We do not pretend that more money alone is the answer to the problems that hold public schools back. However, unmet needs were obvious in the districts where we worked. In some instances, Foundation dollars helped fill gaps in providing services that districts could not (or would not) pay for themselves. From the start, it was clear that districts were not devoting enough time and resources to the professional development of teachers.

Some of this was the legacy of budget trade-offs made over the years that gave teachers pay raises in exchange for reductions in training time. To give professional development the top priority it deserves, schools in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative used some of their grant to hire substitutes so regular classroom teachers could get the training needed to meet the demands placed on Leadership Schools.

Technology can help schools in remote places or urban centers overcome the disadvantages of geography. The Internet opens up new opportunities for teachers to hone their skills on-line, and to engage in e-mail discussions daily with mentors and peers. A centerpiece of the South Florida Annenberg Challenge's work was creating a Web site for training principals and other school leaders.

Technology is no silver bullet. Most education work is labor intensive, and the best teaching often is done one on one, not just with students but also with teachers mentoring other teachers.

Our experience in Challenge sites offers powerful testimony to the importance of helping teachers become lifelong learners. None of us willingly would go to a physician who had learned nothing since graduating from medical school decades ago. Our public school teachers have much to learn from and to teach each other. Their continuing professional development must be first on the agenda of any effort to help children learn more.

LESSON 3:

Schools are too isolated. Reaching out to other schools — forming networks for mutual support and criticism — can help overcome problems.

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The following two approaches made a crucial difference to our work:

- We encouraged schools to form networks to work closely with and learn from one another.
- We created intermediary organizations outside regular school channels to help push for improvements.

We believe both these approaches can serve as powerful levers for improving schools in the future. Too often educators work in isolation: a teacher alone with students, elementary and middle schools apart from high schools, and schools in one neighborhood or district apart from those in the next.

In the San Francisco Bay area, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Detroit, the Challenge helped schools form networks for support and self-criticism. They opened classroom doors and got educators talking with one another about what worked, what did not work and what to try differently.

That approach lay at the heart of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, which sought to overcome the San Francisco Bay area's education inequities by recruiting schools to engage in a constant "cycle of inquiry" akin to the rigorous self-examination that hospitals and corporations subject themselves to in the name of quality improvement.

Teachers in the BASRC came together to scrutinize students' test results and classroom work and to brainstorm ways to pull up achievement. They prepared school portfolios that were critiqued by partner schools each month and shared with parents and the wider community at annual accountability events. They monitored attendance, suspension and dropout rates.

At times they were overwhelmed by all the data they had to analyze. At one Leadership School, a coordinator needed a suitcase with wheels to roll the stacks of test data, student files and printouts into staff meetings. But there was an upside to this challenging work. Teachers saw that their students were learning more, and the teachers themselves thought they were getting better at their chosen profession.

In Los Angeles, where as many as a third of students transfer between schools each year, the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project created school families so that children would not be lost as parents shifted them from one school to the next, often within the same neighborhood. For instance, the half-dozen elementary schools in a family might follow the same reading approach and curriculum, so that a child could move more easily between schools.

LAAMP also formed a partnership with four California State University campuses to tackle one of the biggest problems confronting public schools in the state: a chronic shortage of qualified teachers. The Design for Excellence: Linking Teaching and Achievement (DELTA) Collaborative provided training for veteran teachers as well as an accelerated pathway to the classroom for novices. It reduced the number of teachers hired without credentials.

The Challenge also gave teachers and principals opportunities to learn from other Challenge sites. They shared ideas at regional and national meetings and on the Web. The Rural Challenge brought hundreds of educators, students, parents and community activists from small towns together for its annual "Rendezvous."

All the Challenge projects published newsletters and reports detailing their programs and progress. Web sites offered a wealth of additional information, including the full text of critiques by outside evaluators.

The intermediary organization was a signature feature of most of the Challenge sites. The Annenberg Foundation insisted upon this as a condition of awarding the grants. It wanted these projects to build a bigger tent to attract people who previously had been on the sidelines of local school reform: college presidents, business chiefs, newspaper publishers, foundation executives and other leaders. Many had a history of involvement in fund-raising drives and other charitable efforts for the common good. But they had never felt welcome dealing with the public schools and their problems. The Challenge wanted to change that equation.

In Miami, Leonard Miller, the chairman of Lennar Corp., one of the nation's top homebuilders, had helped raise millions for the University of Miami and Harvard University. "I'd always moaned and groaned like everybody else about public education. Then I said, 'Dammit, I'm going to take this on,'" said Miller, chairman of the South Florida Annenberg Challenge.

As intermediaries, the Challenge sites brought significant resources to this work. Often, even in systems with billion-dollar budgets, the Foundation money and matching grants leveraged lots of activity. However, there were built-in limits to their impact.

Charles Kerchner of the Claremont Graduate School of Education, who led the team that evaluated the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, said that it sought to "penetrate deeply into schools, changing how teachers and administrators perform their daily tasks." As an intermediary, it "functions outside the bureaucratic and political web that defines public schooling. As such, it is freed from the constraints of public operations, but it also lacks any direct authority. It cannot hire, fire, or discipline a school principal or teacher, and it cannot strike terror into the heart of a superintendent."

The Challenge sites were not immune to local school politics and bureaucracy, but neither were they overwhelmed by them. In Philadelphia, despite a strained relationship between the union and the district, thousands of teachers still signed up for professional development classes. In Boston at one stage in contract negotiations, teachers balked at doing any school reform work after regular classroom hours. But the union eventually agreed to give principals and individual school staffs more say over which teachers to

hire – a vital step for most schools trying to turn themselves around.

In Tennessee, the Challenge provided funds for the Public Education Foundation to smooth the merger of the Chattanooga and Hamilton County schools. "We had all dreamed about putting the two school systems together," said Ruth Holmberg, retired publisher of *The Chattanooga Times* and chair of the Foundation. "The Annenberg Challenge made the difference. It lifted a cloud and gave us membership in a national initiative and an affirmation that our efforts were going in the right direction."

Close inspection at Wilson Elementary School.

Most of the Challenge organizations laid roots strong enough to survive after the Foundation dollars ran out. The Rural Challenge was the first to reinvent itself, giving birth in 1999 to the Rural School and Community Trust, which provides moral support and legal ammunition for those fighting school consolidation. It continues to sponsor regional meetings that bring rural educators, students and community leaders together. That alone is invaluable to educators such as Margaret MacLean, principal of a 70-student school in Peacham, Vermont, and a leader of the Vermont Rural Partnership. "We don't need consultants and experts to come in and do this, that and the other for us," said MacLean. "We can solve our own problems if we get the training to work together. A lot of the answers are in small places."

In Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project spawned a new policy and advocacy group called the Los Angeles County Alliance for Student Achievement, and a separate parent initiative called Families in Schools. The DELTA Collaborative also continues under the aegis of the Los Angeles Educational Partnership.

Some of the best Challenge work was done in partnership with other education-minded foundations, such as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in the San Francisco Bay area, the Weingart Foundation in Los Angeles, AOL-Time-Warner Foundation in New York City, and the Brown Foundation in Houston.

It sounds like common sense to say that schools should work together on improving teaching and learning, and that other influential voices in the community should lend a helping hand. But it is a lesson worth remembering. As Pamela James, executive director of Schools of the 21st Century, the Detroit Annenberg Challenge, observed: "Lasting change can only be achieved if the culture of the school community is transformed." Schools cannot do this work in isolation. They need to pull together to make it work.

LESSON 4:

Schools need lots of allies to do this work. Parents, businesses and foundations all can play a vital role — but their support must be built.

Many parents were surprised to see the school coming out to the community. It was probably the first time some of them actually saw the teachers. In high rises you'd hear kids say, "Oh, there's my principal! There's my teacher!"

—Philadelphia Children Achieving Challenge program director Leroy Howell

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The Challenge found ways to widen the circle of those concerned about the public schools and doing something to improve them.

The Challenge got parents more involved in their children's schools. It mounted literacy efforts that taught parents as well as children how to read. It helped schools open parent centers where the adults could improve their own skills and work on getting their children a better education. It taught teachers how to listen more carefully and attentively to parents' concerns.

The Challenge enlisted business executives and university presidents in this cause, some for the first time. It encouraged other foundations to coordinate their school efforts and avoid working at cross-purposes.

It is common knowledge that students learn more in schools with strong support from parents. Inner-city schools often have great difficulty in getting parents involved. The Challenge set out to change that. Schools boosted turnouts at back-to-school nights by staging bilingual phone-a-thons beforehand to let parents know they were welcome. The Challenge encouraged parents to do more than just attend the spaghetti dinners but to look for ways to involve themselves deeply in the life of their children's school and education.

The Philadelphia schools set a goal of recruiting 10,000 parents, grandparents and other school volunteers, and it got almost 15,000.

The Boston Annenberg Challenge paid a $5,000 annual stipend to parent liaisons for 10 hours of work each week at each of its 60 schools. At the Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School, three parents split the stipend and usually wound up spending many more hours working side by side with O'Hearn's classroom teachers. "Parents are thinking as teachers really," said parent Allie Bledsoe. "So much work needs to be done one on one."

The Boston Challenge also sent parents newsletters and brochures keeping them up-to-date on changes in the schools. One posed these questions for parents to ask at back-to-school nights:

- May I have a syllabus?
- Does what you teach match the (state) standards?
- Can you show me some of my child's work and explain how you graded it?
- What level work is my child doing in each subject?
- How and when will you let me know if my child needs more help?

Expanding the mind at Garfield Elementary School in Brighton, Massachusetts.

For families struggling to make ends meet, it may not be easy for a parent to get to school for a conference with a teacher. Apart from the difficulties of getting time off from work and arranging baby-sitting and transportation, some parents are dealing with their own bad memories of school.

"Parents have to feel like the school wants them to be there," said Lisa Delpit, professor and director of the Center for Urban Educational

Excellence at Georgia State University in Atlanta. "Why would we expect them to suddenly show up at the schoolhouse door when this was a very hostile and alien place?"

Other Challenge sites also realized the importance of changing parent attitudes if children were to find success in the classroom.

"Parents were afraid of school; they weren't comfortable in school. They felt they didn't have the right clothes, and they also had had bad experiences in the educational system – as dropouts or getting in trouble all the time," said Linda Clarke, executive director of the Houston Annenberg Challenge.

The Houston Challenge reached out to the city's poorest neighborhoods. "We went into public housing and said, 'We need you to help us; we want to know what you think,'" said Clarke. "Now we have parent liaisons. We bring people into the schools and also meet in people's homes."

In Detroit, one cluster of schools hired parent and community liaisons who made 20 to 40 calls to parents each day and distributed 6,000 flyers each month alerting families to events inside their local schools. At back-to-school nights, attendance jumped from less than half to two-thirds of the parents.

After the Mississippi legislature enacted a law holding schools to higher standards, the Rural

Students from the New York City Museum School use the Brooklyn Museum of Art as a vehicle to learn multiple subjects.

School and Community Trust helped parents from the Delta voice concerns that the state was raising the bar without giving poor, predominantly black schools any extra help. The State Department of Education addressed some of their concerns but ignored others. Still, said Helen John-

Sampling the water quality at the marina in Lubec, Maine.

son, a parent and organizer from Lexington, Mississippi, "We got our foot in the door. They can't close us out like before."

One of the smallest Challenge grants – $1 million to help three elementary schools in an impoverished 72-square-block neighborhood in West Baltimore known as Sandtown-Winchester – was used to help implement the highly scripted direct instruction method of teaching to improve literacy. Two schools made steady progress, but the third sputtered, and the state turned it over to private management. Nevertheless, Baltimore was impressed enough to adopt the direct instruction approach for 15 more schools.

Other foundations helped magnify the Challenge work in many places. It would have been understandable if donors had been reluctant to give to an effort so closely identified with Ambassador Annenberg, but that was not the case. Foundations joined the Challenge without worrying about who got credit for the work.

The Boston Plan for Excellence worked with the new Fund for Nonprofits to coordinate the public school funding of nine foundations. Most had been pursuing separate strategies to improve schools. It wasn't easy for each to sacrifice top billing, but they took to heart the superintendent's complaint about teachers suffering from overload of disjointed reform projects.

The foundations saw this as "an historic opportunity to reinvent and invigorate urban education," said Kathy McHugh, of the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust, who chairs the Fund for Nonprofits. Just as educators are being asked to try new teaching methods, businesses, community groups and others working with the schools may need to change their methods, too.

LESSON 5:

Professional development holds the key to better schools. We found teachers — new ones and veterans — eager to become better instructors, and we helped them do it.

A teacher will say, "I've got to get to Chapter 38 by May." But what difference does it make if you get to Chapter 58 if the kids haven't learned anything, haven't gained any skills, or made any of that knowledge their own?

—Chattanooga teacher Gloria Moore

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The Challenge work that delivered the best return was the money invested in giving teachers sustained opportunities to improve their classroom skills.

It was the largest activity that Challenge projects engaged in – and the most productive.

The Challenge gave teachers the time and resources to get help from peers in schools. It created coaching and mentorship programs called critical friends groups, where teachers confided in and learned from peers within their own school and within networks of schools.

It helped teachers regain training days lost to budget cuts and, more important, it helped align what they were taught in these sessions to the skills and techniques teachers needed to help their students meet higher standards.

In New York City, the New York Networks for School Renewal collaborated with both the United Federation of Teachers and the Board of Education to create a support system for new teachers: the New Educator Support Team, which started with novice teachers in 10 schools and has expanded from there.

The Challenge sponsored workshops and summer tutorials where thousands of teachers brushed up old skills and acquired new ones. The Challenge taught teachers and principals how to make sense of test data and to put that knowledge to use tailoring instruction to the individual child. Teachers began looking at test scores not as a confirmation of fate but as clues to improving children's learning.

This approach repudiated the way almost all U.S. schools and classrooms once were organized (and many still are): by measuring children's "innate" intelligence and sorting those who possessed it and those who did not into different tracks. Some teachers thought they had done their job if they covered the syllabus, regardless of how well or how many students actually mastered it.

The Challenge recognized and acted on the belief that good teaching makes a difference. For students whose lives are strewn with disadvantages, it can make a crucial difference.

We knew something else of equal importance: good teaching itself can be taught.

All too often, the professional development opportunities that school districts offer consist of one-shot, one-day seminars by itinerant experts. The Challenge sites sought to imbed professional development into the fabric of the school and the teachers' work lives.

Merrill Vargo, executive director of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, said, "For us, the question became not what professional development should look like for teachers, but what must schools do so that a young professional can become a better, wiser, braver teacher simply by going to work each day?"

Ellen Guiney, executive director of the Boston Plan for Excellence and co-director of the Boston Annenberg Challenge, told the story of Tiffany, a seventh-grader who was reading at the fourth-grade level and for whom writing was a struggle. She was clearly in jeopardy of failing the looming Massachusetts eighth-grade exit exam. Her teacher turned to his critical friends group for help.

Each teacher began offering regular critiques of Tiffany's writing. The child, far from being intimidated, welcomed the attention. Her writing improved markedly. The teachers themselves learned an important lesson. "They began to realize that their own instructional failings and shortcomings made a difference in the kind of work that the student did," said Guiney. "It changed minds."

Boston now devotes almost $24 million, or 4 percent of its budget, to teacher professional development – almost $5,000 per teacher and principal.

When Darline Robles was hired as Salt Lake City's superintendent in 1995, she immediately began talking to the school board about the need to dig more deeply into the district's test data. "They looked at me and said, 'The data look pretty good,'" she recalled. It was only when she broke the data down by race and ethnicity that the board realized it had a problem on its hands.

Talking it over at the Santa Fe Indian School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a part of the Rural Challenge.

She also had to convince the district's 38 principals. She sat them down in small groups, pored over test results and showed veteran principals things they did not know about their own schools. One was shocked to find that "mobile" students – those who had just transferred in –

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Computer lab instruction at the Santa Fe Indian School.

scored higher than those who had spent three years in the school. "That really woke them up," the superintendent said.

Marta Casillas, executive director of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, said, "You have to create a culture of inquiry that is always flowing through the system, where people are eager to learn and to ask, 'Are we doing the right thing? Are the kids learning? Which ones? Who isn't?' To do that, you need good data."

Ken Rolling, executive director of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, said, "We considered and addressed many approaches, but at the end of the day, all fingers pointed to teacher and principal professional development as the main priority we needed to address."

Janice Henderson, a language arts teacher at Houston's Olle Middle School, credits a critical friends group with transforming her teaching. Beforehand, she regularly got sincere but misguided compliments on her classroom management. "'It's so quiet!' they'd say. And I didn't want that, I wanted my children to be able to learn from each other, the way a critical friends group works," she explained. Now her classroom is noisy, but "it's good noise. The children are learning, and they're having fun." Her experience underscored what every good teacher knows: Teaching is a two-way street, with instructors learning from their pupils even as they seek to share new knowledge with them.

To those who believe that the only key to raising school standards is imposing a strict testing regime and teacher-proof, standardized curricula, we say this: Without better, more confident and empowered teachers, those strategies inevitably will fall short.

LESSON 6:

We helped students and teachers to get to know each other better. We found ways to make big schools small and small schools better.

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Every Challenge site sought to make schools smaller, friendlier places, especially high school, where so many youths lose heart and interest.

During the postwar baby boom of the 1950s, James Conant, the former president of Harvard University, spread the gospel that bigger was better and that depriving students of large, comprehensive high schools was practically educational malpractice. Larger schools could offer more courses and amenities, from labs to libraries to athletic fields. School districts heeded the message.

But Conant's crystal ball had not foretold all. These larger schools were more impersonal and their students more alienated. They had higher dropout rates. Bigger schools may make logistical and financial sense, but the human factor was left out of that equation. Students learn more when they feel connected to their schools and can tell that teachers care about them. They are also more congenial places for the faculty to teach.

One of the tenets of the Challenge was that every child should attend a school where he or she was known well by the teachers, principal and staff.

Small schools were the rallying cry of the New York Networks for School Renewal. That project helped small schools gain a permanent place in the nation's largest school system. Fifty thousand students now attend these schools. Researchers at New York University demonstrated that although New York's small schools spent more per pupil, they spent less per graduate because fewer students dropped out.

Small classes are not a panacea. "Small is better, but it's not sufficient," said Judith Rizzo, New York's deputy chancellor, who found on close inspection that some of New York's small schools were faring well academically, whereas others were not. She helped the latter address their shortcomings. "You've got to be willing and able to do midcourse corrections," said Rizzo.

Preserving small schools is the life's purpose of the Rural School and Community Trust. For years, policymakers responded to the problem of dwindling enrollments in rural schools by shutting them down and building larger, regional facilities, even if that meant busing children for hours over mountain roads in winter.

The Rural Trust sponsored research in Georgia, Montana, Ohio and Texas that found small schools can help alleviate the grinding effect of poverty on student achievement. Rachel Tompkins, president of the Rural School and Community Trust, said the Challenge gave rural schools "visibility, credibility and confidence. All of a sudden, things that seemed impossible were possible."

Edd Diden, principal of 400-student Wartburg Central High School in East Tennessee, which shared a $306,000 Challenge grant from the Chattanooga Public Education Foundation with other Morgan County schools, tapped those funds and others to expand the faculty from 20 to 27. Wartburg students taped oral histories of local residents. Diden said he used to "hear kids say a lot, 'I can't wait to get out of this hick town.' Now, you don't hear that much anymore."

Parent/child pre-school program at Arminta Elementary School in North Hollywood, California.

Many states, including California, have sought to reduce class size, especially in the early grades, in hopes of spurring student achievement. Randy Ross, vice president of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, raised alarms that the move could backfire on inner-city schools, which already faced a shortage of capable, certified teachers. He warned policymakers that California's class-size initiative would drain experienced teachers from inner-city schools, leaving students with the greatest needs even more likely to be taught by an unseasoned, uncertified instructor.

At North Hollywood High School, which now runs year-round to accommodate 3,500 students in classrooms built for 1,800, Principal John Hyland, with help from the Challenge, divided the freshman class of 1,100 into 20 "Husky Dens," each with 55 students and its own volunteer faculty mentor. North Hollywood has created a smorgasbord of special programs that range from a Zoo Magnet to a Transportation Careers Academy to a Social Justice Academy. Hyland's goal is to convert the entire school into small learning communities where adults will recognize that a student is struggling long before he or she simply disappears.

The Challenge work in New York, rural America and Los Angeles affirmed this principle: We need schools where every child is a face, not just a name, and where adults stand ready to catch children before they fall.

LESSON 7:

Schools need strong leadership — not just from principals and superintendents — but also in the classroom, on school boards, in the community and in state capitals.

Leadership is not necessarily a person, it's a function. There are many more "instructional leaders" in a school than the one site manager serving as principal.

—BASRC Executive Director Merrill Vargo

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It was clear from the Challenge that public schools cannot make progress without strong leaders – not just in the office of principal and superintendent – but also in the classroom, on school boards and in the wider community, including political representatives and those in positions of responsibility in businesses, universities and foundations.

Poetry reading in the auditorium at Garfield Elementary School in Brighton, Massachusetts, a part of the Boston Annenberg Challenge.

Even as the Challenge program came to a conclusion, several national initiatives were under way to help schools attract stronger leaders. Several Challenge sites made this a top goal, and it remains the emphasis of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform's Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts.

Some school leaders are born, but most grow into the role, given the combination of responsibility, trust, training, experience and support required by these difficult jobs. The Challenge sites recognized the importance of broadening and deepening leadership inside schools, among both principals and teachers. Several projects worked to make charter schools a success; in these schools, the teachers usually assume a large role in decision making as a team. Almost half the Challenge sites created leadership academies.

Although the Challenge pushed to give classroom teachers more time and space to grow as professionals, it recognized that it was equally essential for principals to grow in their jobs. The Challenge also sought to broaden the pipeline of those moving into leadership ranks.

Houston's new Leadership Academy enrolled 29 principals in its first two-year class. The principals meet monthly in small teams to share ideas and troubleshoot problems, and regularly hear experts discuss what schools elsewhere are doing to meet public demands for higher quality.

In Chattanooga, 27 of the first 52 participants in the leadership program now are working as principals, assistant principals or consulting teachers.

When Florida began grading public schools in 1999 as part of a tough accountability scheme called the *A+* Plan for Education, the South Florida Annenberg Challenge teamed with a business leaders' group called the Florida Council of 100 to reach out to schools at the bottom. Individual CEOs adopted seven *D* schools. Their companies provided financial aid, but the heart of the Partnership to Advance School Success (PASS) program was not money but mentorship.

At Miami's Bent Tree Elementary School, principal Bart Christie was skeptical when PASS lined up real estate developer Armando Codina as his adviser. "I did not want a CEO telling me how to run my school," the young principal recalled. However, they soon developed strong bonds, and Christie found himself picking up valuable management lessons from the business executive during frequent phone conversations. Bent Tree now gets an *A* on the state's ratings.

Friends at Wilson Elementary School.

Public schools need more Armando Codinas and other allies in the business community. They need teachers, principals and superintendents who are willing to take responsibility and get help to perform their jobs better and to elevate the performance of those around them. They also need leaders on school boards, in mayors' offices, in state capitals and in Washington, D.C., who will put children ahead of politics and provide the resources and direction that schools need.

LESSON 8:

Schools cannot improve without accountability. However, those who set the policy and allocate resources should also be held accountable.

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The Challenge sites did not work in lockstep. They pursued separate strategies to make local public schools better. Nevertheless, there were common threads in their approaches. They sought to use information as a lever to raise school performance, letting parents and the public know more about student performance.

They also stressed accountability: the accountability of parents and students, of teachers, of principals and superintendents, and indeed of entire communities. This is a broader notion of school accountability than is commonly found in our schools.

Many states have moved in the past 10 years to impose narrow accountability systems on public schools, usually tied to scores on state-mandated tests. They have adopted tests for graduation from elementary and high schools, and offered teachers and staffs bonuses if the whole school made sufficient progress on these tests.

The Challenge pushed schools to make their performance public in ways few had ever done before. In the San Francisco Bay area, Houston, Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, the Challenge sites organized annual public accountability events in which schools' strengths and shortcomings were held up to intense scrutiny, and parents and the general public were given a voice in discussions of how to improve their schools.

Self-reflection and peer review lay at the heart of the cycle of inquiry in which the Leadership Schools of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative participated. Stanford researchers found that teachers in 75 percent of the BASRC schools were breaking down achievement data to examine racial and ethnic disparities. In a May 2000 report, they quoted one urban high school principal:

> There are people even on our campus that will not accept that [gap] without seeing the data. That's why the data are really powerful, because it doesn't allow you to say, "Nah, no." There's no escaping and looking for arguments for not accepting the accountability.

One Bay area school examined its curriculum and support structures after reviewing the achievement patterns for its African-American and Latino students.

The Houston Challenge adopted the cycle of inquiry approach and engaged its teachers in preparing school accountability reports.

The Challenge pushed educators to move beyond once-a-year standardized tests and to comb through other tests and performance measures for clues on why some students fail. In Boston, in a push to improve literacy, the schools set aside 90 minutes each month for teachers to join together to review student work.

Gloria Woods, who directs the Boston Plan for Excellence/Challenge literacy work in 60 Boston schools, follows what students and teachers are doing classroom by classroom. "This is about changing the way teachers think and teach," she said. "We look at the students' work intensely, by

Using technology at Wilson Elementary School.

collecting baseline data in September, collecting their writing in January, collecting it again in June and looking at the growth. The teachers are becoming better practitioners. And the bottom line is: Our children are doing better."

Making sense of test data is no easy task for educators, much less parents. To help, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform distributed a "Framework for Accountability," which shows teachers how to make students' actual work the center of the accountability process.

Accountability is a two-way street. The political leaders who are demanding rightfully that our students, teachers and schools meet higher standards must give them the resources to get the job done.

That was not the case in several of the districts with which we worked. The schools in Philadelphia and New York both waged protracted court battles for increased state funding. New York City won a landmark ruling from a state Supreme Court justice in January 2001 that the state had denied New York City school children their right to "a sound basic education." The state appealed the decision.

Philadelphia made no headway in the courts, and its mayor acquiesced to a state takeover. Detroit's schools, after going through four superintendents in five years and watching enrollment plummet from 190,000 to 155,000, still are struggling.

New York, Philadelphia and Detroit all have waste in their school systems. This is inexcusable, and makes it more difficult for the schools in these cities to make the case that they deserve more funding. At the same time, we must remember that these cities do not have the tax base to provide the resources to educate their children without more help from Albany, Harrisburg and Lansing. Accountability needs to go both ways.

LESSON 9:

Public education in America is better than its image. Public schools and those who work with them must do a better job of telling their stories.

The fund-raising match was horrendous, but it forced us to tell our story over and over again to audiences we otherwise might not talk to. In doing so, we crafted a better message. That was really important. In public schools, we don't tell our stories well.

—Minneapolis School Superintendent Carol Johnson

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The Challenge learned the hard way the importance of communications in school reform work. Many Challenge sites initially gave little or no thought to explaining to the news media and, through the media, to the public at large the nature of and the rationale for the work they undertook.

Many are wary of media coverage, convinced that the press is more interested in conflict and controversy than with covering the long, difficult struggle of poor or mediocre schools to become better. This may be so, but many Challenge sites did not do enough to convince the media that there were other, more interesting story lines to pursue.

In hindsight, Challenge sites, the Annenberg Foundation and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform should have paid more attention from the start to how we communicated our messages, both to those who worked with the Challenge, and to the wider public and media. We found that the more we talked, the clearer our message became.

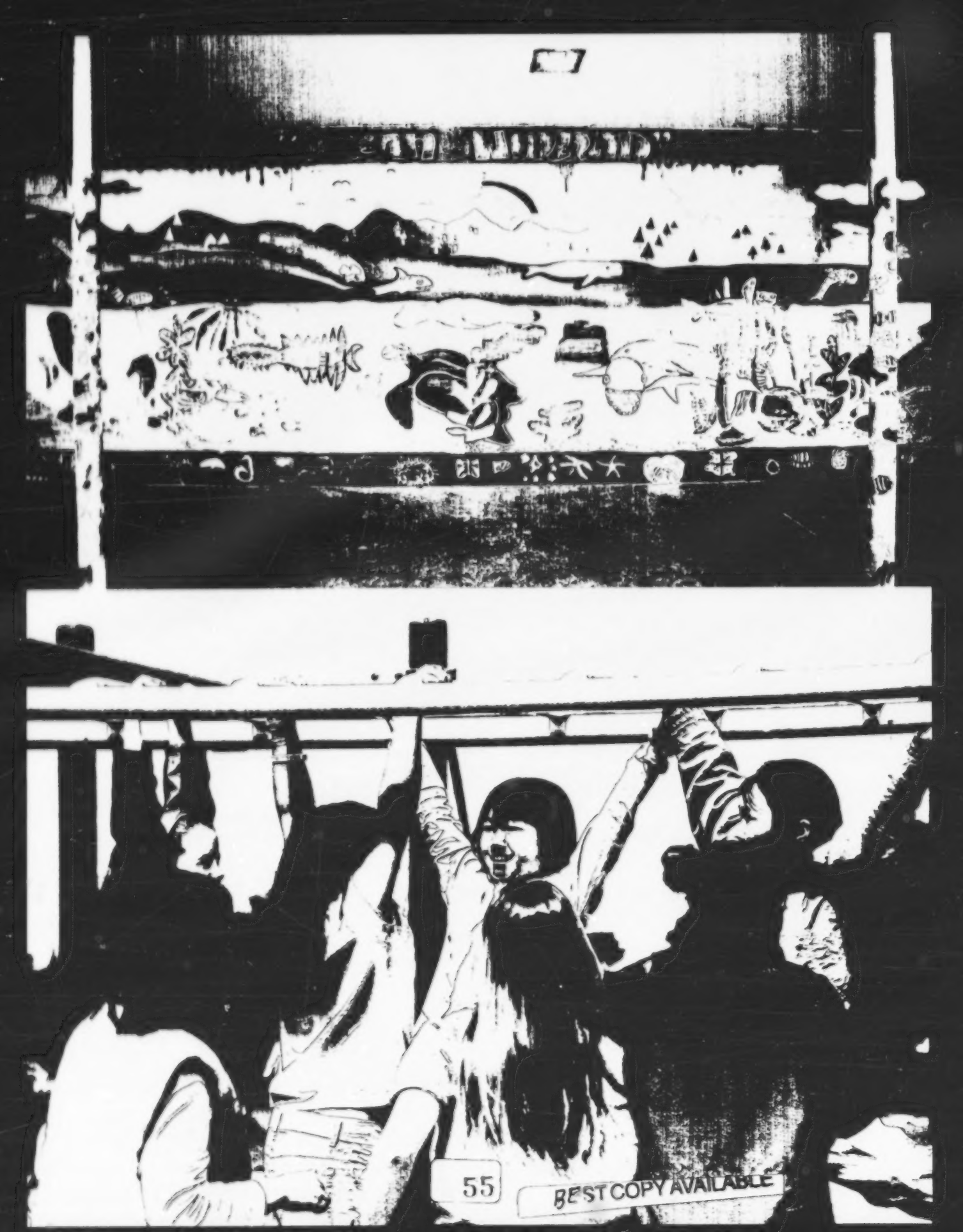
We know that many public schools are not doing the job they should be doing. We have worked to raise both the expectations and achievements of teachers, students and schools. But we also believe that public schools frequently do not get credit for the progress being achieved.

The public and policymakers often have unrealistic expectations of how quickly the schools can change. Judy Hornbacher, executive director of Arts for Academic Achievement in Minneapolis, exaggerated only slightly when she said, "Five minutes after we started, everyone wanted to know whether we had proved that the arts increase academic achievement."

The Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project realized it needed communications help after it held a major public accountability event, and the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article focusing on its failures. Some of the ammunition came from LAAMP's leaders, who were nonetheless taken aback by the tone of the article. They had been excited to hear dozens of the 900 teachers, students and parents at the accountability event talk about how the Challenge work was changing their schools for the better. The newspaper's spin was how little had been accomplished and how far these schools still had to go. Both, in their way, were right. Each reflected institutional biases: the professional optimism of the educator and the professional skepticism of the journalist.

A LAAMP board member said that like most nonprofit groups, LAAMP wanted to spend its grant on direct services, not on public relations.

Public schools are not very good at public relations, but their failings as communicators are larger than that. Schools are insular. Many principals and teachers do not want parents, much less reporters, in their classrooms. Legitimate security concerns have added to some schools' fortress image. Nonetheless, schools need to find ways to open up their doors and enlist more community help in the vital business of educating children.



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They need to get more local citizens, businesses and other community institutions and organizations involved in this work, and they need to communicate in language that parents and the rest of the public understand.

It's not enough to tell someone, "Your child scored at the 20th percentile on the SAT-9 or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills." They need to know what the test is measuring and what it means for their child's future. They need to know how other children in the same classroom and the same school are performing. Most important, parents need to know what they can do and what the professional educators propose to help the child improve.

The Challenge sought to close the communication gaps between school and home. Some examples:

- The Boston Challenge regularly published newsletters and newspapers aimed at both teachers and parents. It collaborated with the district on *Great Expectations*, a guide to the changes inside Boston's schools. *The Boston Globe* ran the entire guide as an insert.
- In Philadelphia, the Children Achieving Challenge produced full-size calendars for every parent that listed important dates and provided monthly tips on how to help children achieve.
- The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative's monthly *In Depth* newsletter served as a bulletin board for school accountability events, along with promising new practices and research on closing the achievement gap.
- In Minneapolis, *Annenberg Collage*, a colorful monthly newsletter, told in words and pictures

Students and adults come together for the Millennium Orchestra at PS 107 in Queens, New York, a part of the New York Center for Arts Education.

Learning to plant and grow at Browning Elementary School in Houston, Texas, a part of the Houston Annenberg Challenge.

how the performing arts fit into the district's academic strides.

- *Rural Roots*, the bimonthly newsletter of the Rural School and Community Trust, highlighted examples of how schools made community-building activities a vital part of their curriculum.
- The Chicago Challenge produced *How to Grow Healthy Schools: A Guide to Improving Public Education* and other publications aimed at informing teachers and parents about how to turn around failing schools.

In the Challenge, we saw repeated instances where schools and school districts failed to put their best foot forward, and failed to build public support for change. Often they had trouble getting their message out internally as well as externally.

This needs to change. Educators need to speak clearly about their work. They need to jettison the jargon when speaking to the public. They need to be frank about successes and failures. They need to be open, not closed or secretive. They need to do a better job of explaining what they do and how they do it. In these ways, educators can win the recognition they deserve and be treated like the professionals they are.

For its part, the press should remember that it is one of the most powerful and influential institutions in a community. By providing balanced, fair coverage of education issues, the press can inform and engage the public and produce the community involvement that is vital to any school improvement effort.

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Final Words

The Challenge was – and remains – an unrelenting advocate and ally for *public* schools.

We believe that the Challenge helped create richer learning opportunities for thousands of children and youths – opportunities that extend well into the future.

The Challenge:

- Deepened the instructional capacity of teachers and the schools in which they work. It created new models and strategies that allow teachers to expand their own skills even as they instruct our children.
- Engaged outside partners to collaborate with public schools in powerful new ways. These intermediary organizations can play a lasting role in helping public schools improve.
- Bolstered the civic capacity to stand up for public education. The Challenge helped build strong coalitions of businesses, foundations, universities and grassroots community groups to muster greater public will and support for schools.

The presence of more skillful teachers and school leaders, vital local partnerships, and a powerful public will for school reform and renewal will serve as a solid foundation for helping to improve academic learning and achievement for the future.

We see exciting things happening in America's public schools. We see children making progress, even where poverty strains to hold them back. We see teachers seizing opportunities for professional growth and development, even as districts struggle to pay them adequately and attract the next generation of teachers.

We see how hard educators are working in thousands of schools and classrooms across the country to improve their performance and the performance of their students. The public schools are working, as they have for more than a century, to lift children up and give them the tools they need to break the barriers of poverty and prejudice.

We are heartened by the words of Phyllis Gudowski, a team leader for the Design for Excellence: Linking Teaching and Achievement Collaborative, whom we met inside the Professional Development Center at Francis Polytechnic High School in Los Angeles:

> If you keep saying "Never, never, never," public education isn't going anywhere. People told us we'd never be able to put the DELTA program together. Until we start saying, "We can, and we will" – and bring everyone together to do it – that's when we're going to change the course of education.

To allies and critics, to businesses and foundations, to universities and community organizations, to fellow citizens and elected leaders, we say: We cannot let these schools down. They are our hope and our obligation. These are our children. They deserve not only a better education – but also the best.

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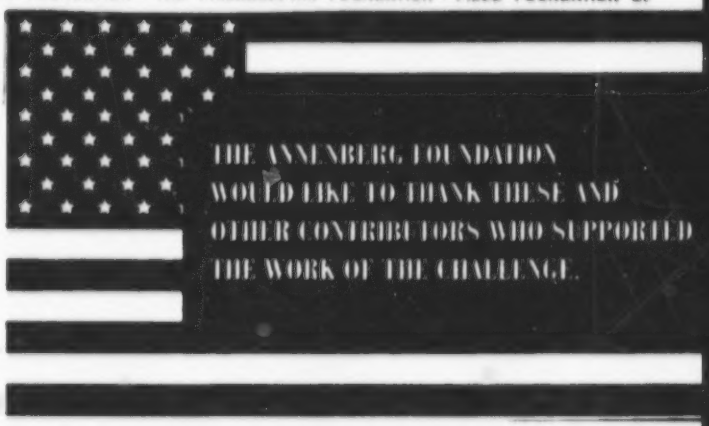

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